

# ELIO'S WEBLOG

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## Eric Gagné made the Brewers loose

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### GAGNE'S MELTDOWN IN 10TH SPELLS DOOM FOR BREWERS

Edwin Encarnacion and Paul Bako hit consecutive home runs against losing pitcher Eric Gagne in the 10th inning, and Ken Griffey Jr. singled home the winning run later in the inning as the Cincinnati Reds rallied to stun the visiting Milwaukee Brewers 4-3 on Sunday.

After the Brewers had scored twice in the top of the inning, the Reds came alive in the bottom half. Encarnacion greeted Gagne (1-1) with his second homer of the game to make it 3-2 before Bako followed with another to tie the score.

Gagne, who was pitching for the fourth day in a row, then walked Scott Hatteberg before being pulled in favor of Salomon Torres. An infield single by Brandon Phillips with one out moved pinch runner Ryan Freel to second and set up Griffey.

Brewers right-hander Yovani Gallardo was stellar in his first start of 2008, allowing one run and four hits in eight innings. He missed the first three weeks of the regular season while recovering from offseason surgery on his left knee.

<http://www.suntimes.com/sports/baseball/905829,CST-SPT-nl21.article>

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## Brewers

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The Brewers lost again 4-1 to the Reds

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## Stop Dog Fighting

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### Q. When and how did dog fighting come to America?

Although there are historical accounts of dog fights going back to the 1750's, widespread activity emerged after the Civil War, with professional pits proliferating in the 1860's, mainly in the Northeast.

Ironically, it was a common entertainment for police officers and firemen, and the "Police Gazette" served as a major source of information on dog fighting for many years. Although many laws were passed outlawing the activity, dog fighting continued to expand throughout the 20th century.

### Q. Where did these animals come from?

Many of the animals were brought from England and Ireland, where dog fighting had begun to flourish after bull-baiting and bear-baiting became illegal in the 1830's.

### Q. What has been the role of the ASPCA in combating dog fighting over the years?

Henry Bergh, founder of the ASPCA, was particularly repulsed by the brutality of the dog fighting he saw in New York and elsewhere. His 1867 revision of the state's animal cruelty law made **all** forms of animal fighting illegal for the first time, including bull, bear, dog and cock fighting. The involvement of regular police in dog fighting activity was one of the reasons Bergh sought and received authority for the ASPCA to have arrest powers for his own humane law enforcement agents to enforce these tough new laws.

Throughout its history, the ASPCA has fought for stronger laws against all forms of animal cruelty. A 1981 report commissioned by the ASPCA

entitled “Dog fighting in America: A National Overview,” concluded that dog fighting was more widespread than the public or law enforcement imagined and that stronger laws at the state and federal level were needed.

### **Q. How does the ASPCA combat dog fighting today?**

Today, the ASPCA incorporates information on blood sports in the animal cruelty trainings it provides in New York’s police academies as well as in police officer trainings around the country.

It also provides training on a national level to animal control officers and veterinarians on how to identify the signs of animal cruelty, as well as in crime scene investigation (CSI).

In addition, the ASPCA regularly provides training and assistance to prosecutors on how to build an effective case against those charged with these crimes, and its experts often serve as witnesses in many such cases. Several ASPCA staff have published educational and reference books on animal cruelty investigation and prosecution, which are widely referred to all around the country.

The ASPCA’s Humane Law Enforcement (HLE) department is active in enforcing New York City’s animal cruelty laws and has played a vital role in raising awareness of animal cruelty through its presence on the hit reality television show “Animal Precinct” on Animal Planet.

### **Q. Who is involved in dog fighting?**

Most law enforcement experts divide dogfight activity into three categories: street fighting, hobbyist fighting and professional activity:

- **“Street”** fighters engage in dog fights that are informal, street corner, back alley and playground activities. Stripped of the rules and formality of the traditional pit fight, these are spontaneous events triggered by insults, turf invasions or the simple taunt, “My dog can kill yours.” Many of these participants lack even a semblance of respect for the animals they fight, forcing them to train while wearing heavy chains to build stamina, and picking street fights in which they could get seriously hurt. Many of the dogs are bred to be a threat not only to other dogs, but to people as well—with tragic consequences. “Street” fights are frequently associated with gang activities. The fights may be conducted with money, drugs or bragging rights as the primary payoff. There is often no attempt to care for animals injured in the fight and police or animal control officers frequently encounter dead or dying animals in the aftermath of such fights. This activity is very difficult to respond to unless it is reported immediately. “Professional” fighters and “hobbyists” decry the techniques and results of these newcomers to the “blood sport.”
- **“Hobbyist”** fighters are more organized, with one or more dogs participating in several organized fights a year as a sideline for both “entertainment” and to attempt to supplement income. They pay more attention to care and breeding of the dogs and are more likely to be traveling across state lines for events.
- **“Professional”** dog fighters often have large numbers of animals (often 50 or more) and earn money from breeding, selling and fighting dogs at a central location and on the road. They often pay particular attention to promoting established winning bloodlines and to long-term conditioning of animals. They regularly dispose of animals that are not successful fighters or breeders using a variety of methods, including shooting and blunt force trauma. Unlike “professional” dog fighters of the past, both “professionals” and “hobbyists” of today may dispose of dogs that are too human-aggressive for the pit by selling them to “street” fighters or others who are simply looking for an aggressive dog—thus contributing to the dog bite problem.

In recent years a fourth category of dog fighters seems to be emerging, with some wealthier individuals from the sports and entertainment worlds allegedly using their financial resources to promote “professional” dog fighting enterprises, which essentially use the philosophy and training techniques usually associated with street fighting.

### **Q. How widespread is dog fighting in America?**

As with any other illegal underground activity, it is impossible to determine how many people may be involved in dog fighting. Estimates based on fight reports in underground dog fighting publications, and on animals entering shelters with evidence of fighting, suggest that the number of people involved in dog fighting in the U.S. is in the tens of thousands.

While organized dog fighting activity seemed to decline in the 1990's, many law enforcement and animal control officials feel that it has rebounded in recent years. Street fighting has reportedly continued to grow as a significant component of urban crime. The Internet has also made it easier for dog fighters to rapidly exchange information about animals and fights.

**Q. Is dog fighting more prevalent in one part of the country or another?**

No. Dog fighting has been reported in urban, suburban and rural settings in all regions of the country.

Fighters were traditionally attracted to states with weaker penalties for dog fighting and animal cruelty, many in the South—but these laws have generally been made stronger throughout the country. As a result, this activity is no longer limited to any single area, but it is more likely to thrive wherever enforcement of these laws is weak.

**Q. What types of people are involved in dog fighting?**

Just as dog fighting cuts across many regions of the country, participants and spectators at dogfights are a diverse group. While some might typify dog fighting as a symptom of urban decay, not every dog fighter is economically disadvantaged. **There are people who promote or participate in dog fighting from every community and background.** Audiences contain lawyers, judges and teachers drawn in by the excitement and thrill of the blood sport.

**Q. Is it true that “hip-hop” or “rap” culture promotes dog fighting?**

No. Although many people associate dog fighting themes and images with “hip-hop” or “rap” culture, this is a relatively recent addition to an enterprise that has been active for more than a century and half.

Ironically, some of this change is related to attempts to ban pit bulls. Whenever pit bulls are outlawed, the ownership of the breed and association with dog fighting can become an “outlaw” status symbol.

**Q. What other crimes are associated with dog fighting?**

Many of the practices associated with the raising and training of fighting dogs can be prosecuted separately as animal abuse or neglect. In addition, dog fighting, by its very nature, involves illegal gambling. Dog fighters often face additional charges related to drug, alcohol and weapons violations as well as probation violations. Arguments over dog fights have also resulted in incidents that have led to charges of assault and even homicide. Other charges might include conspiracy, corruption of minors, money laundering, as well as several others.

**Q. Why do people get involved in dog fighting?**

There are many reasons people are attracted to dog fighting. The most basic is greed. Major dog fight raids have resulted in seizures of more than \$500,000, and it is not unusual for \$20,000 – \$30,000 to change hands in a single fight. Stud fees and the sale of pups from promising bloodlines can also bring in thousands of dollars.

For others, the attraction lies in using the animals as an extension of themselves to fight their battles for them, and demonstrate their strength and prowess. However, when a dog loses, this can cause the owner of the dog to lose not only money, but status, and may lead to brutal actions against the dog.

For others, the appeal simply seems to come from the sadistic enjoyment of a brutal spectacle.

**Q. What dogs are used in dog fighting?**

Although there are many breeds of dogs used for fighting worldwide, the dog of choice for fighting in America is the American Pit Bull Terrier. In addition, Fila Brasileiros, Dog Argentinos and Presa Canarios

have also been used in this blood sport. Occasionally Doberman Pinschers or German Shepherds are reportedly used in street fights, or as “bait dogs” to train fighting dogs.

In the early days of dog fighting, the Bull Terrier was the dog of choice for this brutal blood sport, but it was replaced in the early 20th century by the American Pit Bull Terrier, the Americanized version of the bull terriers developed from larger bull-baiting dogs in England, when smaller and faster dogs were needed to replace the larger dogs used in bull and bear-baiting that took place in pits.

#### **Q. Does this mean the pit bull is unsuitable as a pet?**

Even though it was bred as a fighting dog—or perhaps because of that—the American Pit Bull Terrier was one of the most popular dogs of the time, noted for its strength, intelligence and devotion to its master. Today, responsible breeders who breed pit bulls as pets have generally selected **against** the high degree of aggression to other animals seen in fighting lines, while preserving the many desirable qualities of the breed.

It is important to remember any dog can become aggressive, depending on its upbringing and environment. When a dog that is loved, well-treated and cared for, no matter its breed, is matched with the right kind of owner and household, it invariably results in a happy match and positive reinforcement of the human-animal bond.

#### **Q. Can all dogs be trained to fight?**

No. It is important to understand that not just any dog can be trained to fight. Much like herding dogs, trailing dogs and other breeds selected for particular roles, fighting dogs are born ready for the training that will prepare them to succeed in the pit, and are bred to have a high degree of dog-dog aggression.

#### **Q. How are fighting dogs raised and trained?**

Fighting dogs must be kept isolated from other dogs, so they spend most of their lives on short heavy chains, often just out of reach of other dogs. They are usually poorly socialized to any other dogs and to most people. However, many “professional” fighters invest much time and money in conditioning their animals. They are often given quality nutrition, basic veterinary care and exercised under controlled conditions where they will have limited contact with other dogs, such as on a treadmill or “jenny.”

The conditioning of fighting dogs may also make use of a variety of legal and illegal drugs, often including anabolic steroids to enhance muscle mass and encourage aggressiveness. Narcotic drugs may also be used to increase the dogs’ aggression and mask pain during a fight. Young animals are often trained or tested by allowing them to fight with other dogs while muzzled or leashed in well-controlled “rolls.” Those that show little inclination to fight may be discarded or killed at an early age. Some fighters will use inexperienced “bait dogs” as sparring partners, often using stolen pets.

There are many other common techniques used in the training and testing of dogs, but these methods vary widely among different fighters and may range from systematic to haphazard. “Street” fighters usually make little investment in conditioning their animals, relying on “quick fixes” to produce aggression. These might starvation, physical abuse, and use of stimulants or other drugs to excite the dogs.

#### **Q. Why do fighting dogs have their ears cropped and tails docked?**

Fighting dogs used by all types of fighters usually have their ears cropped and tails docked close to their bodies. This serves two purposes: First, it limits the number of areas of the body that another dog might grab onto in a fight, and second, it makes it more difficult for other dogs to read the animal’s mood and intentions through the normal body language cues most non-fighting dogs would use to reduce the need for aggressive encounters. (Many fighters perform this cropping/docking themselves, using crude and inhumane techniques. This can lead them to face additional charges related to animal cruelty and/or the illegal practice of veterinary medicine.)

#### **Q. What goes on in a dog fight?**

As noted above, fights can take place in a variety of locations and at



any time. They may be impromptu events in a back alley, or carefully planned and staged enterprises in a location specially designed and maintained for the purpose. Usually the fight takes place in a pit that is between 14 and 20 feet square, with sides that may be plywood, hay bales, chain link or anything else that can contain the animals. The flooring may be dirt, wood, carpet or sawdust. The pit has “scratch lines” marked in opposite corners, where the dogs will face each other 12 to 14 feet apart.

In a more organized fight, the dogs will be weighed to make sure they are approximately the same weight. Handlers will often wash and examine the opponent’s dog to remove any toxic substances that may have been placed on the fur in an attempt to harm the opposing dog. At the start of the fight, the dogs are released from their corners and usually meet in the middle, seeking to get a hold on the opponent, often shaking and tearing to maximize damage. Handlers are not permitted to touch the dogs except when told to do so by the referee. This can happen if dogs become “fanged,” with the tooth of one dog embedded in the skin of its opponent. Becoming “fanged” may require the use of a “breaking stick” (also called a “bite stick”) to pry the animals apart. If the action slows or if a dog turns away from his opponent without renewing his attack, the referee may call a “turn,” and require that the dogs be returned to the corners and released after 20-30 seconds. If the dog that committed the “turn” fails to cross the pit and grip his opponent, the match is over and the other dog is the winner. A draw may occur if both dogs fail to “scratch” several times in succession, i.e. repeatedly fail to cross the “scratch lines” and re-engage in the fight. This is generally a rare and unpopular end for those involved.

#### **Q. How long do dog fights last?**

Fights can last several hours. Both animals may suffer injuries ranging from puncture wounds, lacerations and blood loss to dehydration, crushing injuries and/or broken bones. Although fights are not technically fought to the death, many dogs succumb to their injuries.

#### **Q. What happens to the losing dog?**

Losing dogs are often discarded, killed or left untreated, unless they have had a good history of past performance or come from valuable bloodlines. If the losing dog is perceived to be a particular embarrassment to the reputation or status of its owner, it may be executed in a particularly brutal fashion as part of the “entertainment.”

#### **Q. What are the laws relating to dog fighting?**

Dog fighting is illegal in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. As of 2007, dog fighting is a felony in all states except Idaho and Wyoming, where it is a misdemeanor. In most states, the possession of dogs for the purpose of fighting is also a felony offense. Being a spectator at a dogfight is currently a felony in 20 states, a misdemeanor in 28 and legal only in Georgia and Hawaii.

The federal Animal Welfare Act also prohibits the interstate transport of animals for the purposes of fighting. When federal animal fighting laws were initially enacted in 1976, dog fighting activities were considered to be a misdemeanor with a maximum sentence of one year. For this reason it was very rare that federal authorities were involved in the investigation or prosecution of dog fighting unless other crimes were associated with it, such as drug trafficking, alcohol or firearms violations, or financial crimes.

In 1999, Title 18, Section 48 was added to the U.S. Code, making it a federal crime to “knowingly create, sell or possess a depiction of animal cruelty with the intention of placing that depiction in interstate or foreign commerce for commercial gain.” The term “depiction of animal cruelty” means **any** visual or auditory depiction. This law was specifically enacted to address the proliferation of Internet sales of “crush videos” in which various small animals were shown being stepped on or otherwise killed. Despite its originally narrow focus, the law was used in 2005 to successfully prosecute a Virginia man charged with selling and mailing videotapes of fighting pit bulls.

In 2007, Congress passed the Animal Fighting Prohibition Enforcement Act with strong bipartisan support. The Act became law in May 2007, and provides for felony penalties for interstate commerce, import and export relating to commerce in fighting dogs, fighting cocks and cock fighting paraphernalia. Each violation can result in up to three years in

jail and a \$250,000 fine.

**Q. When did dog fighting first become a felony offense at the state level? What is the average sentence/penalty?**

Dog fighting is a felony in 48 states. The earliest known instance of animal fighting laws is of those laws written by ASPCA founder Henry Bergh in 1867, which made all forms of animal fighting illegal. While it was possible to prosecute dog fighting at the felony level in the District of Columbia as far back as 1892, and in California in 1905, most states enacted their laws in the early to mid 1980's. The average sentence is five years, and/or a fine of \$10,000 (some states, like Louisiana and Michigan have fines upwards of \$25,000 and \$50,000 respectively). Idaho and Wyoming are the only states that still consider dog fighting a misdemeanor; penalties in those states are 6 months/\$5,000 (ID) and 1 yr/\$5,000 (WY).

**Q. What happens to dogs that are seized from dog fight operations? Can they be rehabilitated?**

Fighting dogs have been bred and trained to inflict injuries on other animals, and are difficult to house and care for. They are often relatively friendly to people, primarily adult males, since such people have been the only source of food and attention—but they can be unpredictable around people and any other animals. Concerns about liability, public safety and other risks mean that most animals seized from such operations are not adoptable, meaning they cannot be considered candidates for successful placement, and often have to be euthanized.

Confiscated fighting dogs are also at high risk of being stolen from shelters, foster care or other placements and returned to the fight trade. Exceptions are sometimes made for puppies or other animals who show no signs of training or use in fighting, and who do not exhibit tendencies of aggression towards other animals or people. However, such animals must be carefully evaluated by trained animal behavior professionals, such as Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists, and their placement must be monitored over the long term.

**Q. If dog fighting is so widespread, why don't more cases come to light?**

Dog fighting is a violent and highly secretive enterprise, which is extremely difficult for law enforcement and investigative professionals to infiltrate. A dog fight investigation requires many of the same skills and resources as a major undercover narcotics investigation, and challenges the resources of any agency that seeks to respond to it.

An additional complication is that the evidence likely to be seized includes living creatures, who must be taken care of and maintained while the judicial process unfolds. Most prosecutors would be happy to take on every dog fight case they could, but they are limited by the human and animal care resources available to them.

**Q. What can communities do to combat dog fighting?**

The first step in combating dog fighting is for individuals to alert the authorities to any suspected or actual dog fighting activities in their area—identification of the problem is the first step to a solution.

In addition, the ASPCA recommends the formation of local or state task forces to address dog fighting. These groups should include members from all the major stakeholders in that community: law enforcement, prosecutors, animal control, animal welfare groups, veterinarians, public health officials, housing authorities, the neighborhood watch and others. The group should identify the nature of the problems in the area, the laws that could be applied to these problems, and the resources that are available. Dog fighting is most effectively addressed by a collaborative approach to this heinous crime.

**Q. What can citizens do?**

The enforcement of animal cruelty laws begins with the individual. If you see something, please say something—notify your local police and/or humane law enforcement of any suspicious activities that suggest dog fighting is taking place in your community.

**Q. How prevalent is dog fighting in New York City?**

Organized dog fighting in New York City does not appear to be

prevalent, and the ASPCA rarely sees arrests for such activity. This does not mean that it does not occur, however. Organized fights are conducted in a hyper-clandestine manner, and while they probably would not thrive in the crowded urban environment that New York presents, more casual “pick up” fights do occur.

In general, dog fighting is difficult to detect because of its secretive and underground nature. ASPCA HLE officers report seeing the peripheral effects and elements of dog fighting, but not highly organized fights. These include injured dogs who had extensive wounds consistent with injuries of a ‘bait dog,’ such as scars in various stages of healing, as well as multiple, and often serious, bite wounds. Paraphernalia associated with dog fighting such as treadmills, break sticks, steroids, pain-numbing drugs, syringes and weapons, and large amounts of cash and other evidence of gambling, is occasionally discovered, but not often enough to consider the blood sport prevalent.

**Q. Does the ASPCA’s Bergh Memorial Animal Hospital see many cases of dogs who have incurred injuries as a result of dog fighting? What kind of injuries do these dogs most often show?**

No, the ASPCA’s BMAH rarely, if ever, sees dogs who have incurred injuries as a result of dog fighting. This does not mean that dog fighting does not occur in New York, however. Rather, it is possible that such dogs are simply less likely to be brought to the ASPCA for treatment. Their owners might potentially avoid the ASPCA because they know that the organization is sensitive to signs of animal cruelty and might place them under suspicion.

In general, fighting dogs are also less likely to have access to veterinary professionals for treatment of their injuries. As to the kinds of injuries fighting dogs often bear, these include, but are not limited to: tails and ears cropped in an unprofessional manner (not by a medical professional); serious, multiple bite wounds; and scars in various stages of healing.

**Q. Where do the dogs who are used in dog fights come from?**

For “professional” and “hobbyist” dogfighters, the sale of pups from parents who have won several fights is a major part of their activity. Underground dog fighting publications and websites are commonly used to advertise pups or the availability of breeding stock. Many “street” level fighters think they can also make money by breeding and selling dogs, but a great number of these animals are killed or abandoned if they fail to perform.

**Q. Are there any existing statistics that address the prevalence of dog fighting state -by-state?**

Currently, there are no reliable statistics. This is an underground, illegal activity so it is almost impossible to get accurate information about its prevalence. However, animal control and humane agencies in all parts of the country frequently encounter pit bulls with scars and other indications that they may have been fought, and documented reports of these incidents are certainly on the rise.

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## Stop Animal Cruelty

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## FIGHT ANIMAL CRUELTY

### Puppy Mills

Thinking of getting a dog this year? We've all been tempted by that cute little puppy in the pet store window. Before you give in to the temptation and buy that furry bundle of joy, there are some things you should know.

For one, that cute little puppy most likely came from a large-scale, substandard commercial breeding operation, commonly known as a puppy mill. Puppy mills usually house dogs in overcrowded and often unsanitary conditions, without adequate veterinary care, food, water and socialization. The breeding stocks at puppy mills (possibly your new puppy's mom and dad) are bred as often as possible in order to increase profits. Unlike your lucky puppy, the mom and dad will probably never make it out of the mill.

### Harsh Realities

The result? By buying a pet shop puppy, not only are you likely perpetuating and supporting a cruel industry, you—the consumer—run the risk of taking home a sick puppy! Dogs from puppy mills have been reportedly diagnosed with ailments such as respiratory infections and pneumonia, as well as hereditary defects like hip dysplasia. They may also be poorly socialized to people and other animals. Also, your new "purebred" puppy might not really be a purebred. Dogs at puppy mills are often bred indiscriminately, and lineage records are sometimes falsified to misrepresent that the dog is a purebred, when in fact, the animal is a mixed breed. Responsible breeders do not sell their dogs through pet stores.

### How You Can Help

If you're looking to make a puppy part of your family, check your local shelters first. There are so many amazing dogs who need homes. If your heart is set on a specific breed, keep in mind that one in four shelter dogs is a purebred. Additionally, you can do an Internet search for breed-specific rescue organizations. If those attempts still don't give you the purebred puppy you're looking for, you'll need to learn how to choose a responsible breeder. Puppy Mills

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## MAR 07 The Weather

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## MAR 05 Favre's Hometown Awaits Word from Brett About Retirement

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People in Wisconsin are remembering the legacy of former Packers quarterback Brett Favre. But, so are the folks in his hometown. The FOX 6 News team and Tim Van Vooren bring you the story from Kiln, Mississippi.

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# Favre Retires After 17 Seasons In The NFL.

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Packers quarterback Brett Favre will not return for an 18th NFL season, according to Fox Sports and ESPN.com.

Favre has taken weeks and even months to make his decision after recent seasons, with Cheeseheads hanging on his every word as his football future hangs in the balance.

But unlike the final game of the 2006 season — when Favre provided a cliffhanger by getting choked up in a television interview as he walked off the field in Chicago, only to return once again — nearly everyone assumed he would be back this time.

They were wrong.

Favre has told Packers coach Mike McCarthy that he will retire, his agent Bus Cook told ESPN.com.

Messages The Associated Press left with Cook, McCarthy and the Packers were not immediately returned Tuesday.

Only two years removed from perhaps the worst season of his career, Favre had a resurgence in 2007. He broke several career records, including Dan Marino's career mark for career touchdown passes, powered the Packers to an NFC North title and 13-3 regular season record and was named to his ninth Pro Bowl.

With oversight from offensive-minded McCarthy and surrounded by an underrated group of wide receivers who proved hard to tackle after the catch, Favre had a career-high completion percentage of 66.5. He threw for 4,155 yards, 28 touchdowns and only 15 interceptions.

It was a remarkable turnaround from 2005, Favre's final season under former head coach Mike Sherman, when he threw a career-worst 29 interceptions as the Packers went 4-12.

Given Favre's career resurgence, it was widely assumed that he was leaning toward returning for the 2008 season.

He even said as much just before the Packers' Jan. 12 divisional playoff game against Seattle, telling his hometown newspaper that he wasn't approaching the game as if it would be his last and was more optimistic than in years past about returning.

"For the first time in three years, I haven't thought this could be my last game," Favre told the Biloxi (Miss.) Sun Herald. "I would like to continue longer."

Those comments sent premature shock waves across the state — all the way up to the governor's office, where the political version of a false start was committed.

"Like all Packer fans, I am thrilled that Brett Favre will return to action next year for the green and gold," Gov. Jim Doyle said in a statement. "Brett Favre's tremendous work ethic and willingness to go out and play hard every day represent the true spirit of Wisconsin. I am hopeful that with this announcement behind us, Brett Favre and the Green Bay Packers can focus on the task at hand: defeating the Seattle Seahawks."

The governor's office later amended the statement to say Doyle was "excited to hear Brett Favre talking about returning to action next year."

It was another example of the state's fascination with the future of its favorite quarterback, whose annual flirtation with retirement has become a winter tradition in Wisconsin.

Favre then finished the season on a sour note, suddenly showing his age in the Packers' 23-20 overtime loss to the New York Giants in the NFC Championship game.

Favre struggled in subzero temperatures, throwing an interception on the Packers' second play from scrimmage in overtime to set up the

Giants' game-winning field goal.

After that game, Favre was noncommittal on his future. McCarthy said he wanted Favre to take a step back from the season before making a decision.

But it was widely assumed he would be back.

"I think he's going to come back," Packers receiver Donald Driver said in early January. "I wouldn't be surprised if he comes back. He's having a great year, so it'd be great to see him come back if he decides to."

Retiring Packers chairman Bob Harlan figured Favre would be back, too.

"Yeah, I think he'll be back," Harlan said, on his final official day as the Packers' top executive. "And I felt that way the last couple years, when we've had these long debates about it. I just think he's such a competitor that as long as he feels he can compete, he's going to keep coming back."

Still, in the week leading up to the playoff game against Seattle, Favre said his injuries were starting to linger.

"I'm not getting any younger," said Favre, 38. "I wake up some days and think I can't even touch my toes. I think about that. I think, well, next year is not going to be like some refreshing, awakening season where all of a sudden you're going to feel great. That's not going to happen.

"I carry some of these things with me that maybe you wouldn't see. I tend to dwell on them, at least internally, more than I used to. I don't write them off as quickly as I used to."

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